

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-08

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 INR-05 CIAE-00 NSC-05 SP-02
L-01 CPR-01 /037 W
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FM AMEMBASSY ROME
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5125

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ROME 15394

LIMDIS

FOR EUR/WE

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT,IT
SUBJ: DELEGATION TO THE PAPAL CORONATION: BRIEFING PAPER ON
ITALY'S CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY (DC)

1. THE DC IS ITALY'S LARGEST POLITICAL PARTY. SINCE
WORLD WAR II IT HAS DOMINATED ALL ITALIAN GOVERNMENTS
AS WELL AS MAJOR SECTORS OF ITALIAN SOCIETY (BANKING,
STATE-OWNED ENTERPRISES, EMPLOYERS' ASSOCIATIONS,
AGRICULTURE, ETC.). ITS ELECTORATE GOES ACROSS THE ENTIRE
SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC SPECTRUM, WITH APPROXIMATELY 60
PERCENT OF ITS VOTES COMING FROM BLUE COLLAR AND FARM
LABORERS. IT HAS NO COHERENT POLITICAL OR ECONOMIC
IDEOLOGY, EXCEPT AS IT IS CONSTRAINED ON SPECIFIC
ISSUES (E.G. DIVORCE AND ABORTION) BY ITS CATHOLIC
HERITAGE. IN THE EARLY POSTWAR YEARS, THE DC'S TIES TO
THE CHURCH WERE ACTIVE AND STRONG BUT THEY HAVE ATTENUATED
WITH THE PASING OF TIME AND THE INCREASING SECULARIZATION
OF ITALIAN SOCIETY. THIS PROCESS HAS ALSO BEEN ACCOM-
PANIED BY A GRADUAL SHIFT, OVER THE LAST THIRTY YEARS,
OF THE DC'S POLITICAL ATTITUDES TOWARD THE LEFT OF THE
POLITICAL SPECTRUM.

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2. THE DC'S ELECTORAL STRENGTH IN THE POST-WORLD WAR II
PERIOD HAS REMAINED REMARKABLY CONSTANT. EXCEPT FOR A
HIGH POINT IN 1948 (48 PERCENT) AND A LOW POINT IN LOCAL
ELECTIONS IN 1975 (35 PERCENT), ITS PERCENTAGE OF THE
VOTE HAS GENERALLY OSCILLATED BETWEEN 37 AND 40 PERCENT.
IN THE LAST PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION (1976) FOLLOWING ITS LOW

POINT AND THE STRONG COMMUNIST GAINS IN 1975, IT RETURNED TO 38.8 PERCENT OF THE VOTE. WHILE THERE HAS BEEN NO FULL NATIONAL TEST SINCE 1976, THE TRENDS APPEAR TO BE FAVORING THE DC--PROBABLY FOR LACK OF AN EFFECTIVE ALTERNATIVE FOR THOSE WHO FEAR CONTINUED COMMUNIST GAINS.

3. THE DC IS PRESENTLY IN THE THROES OF A LEADERSHIP CRISIS. FOR THE LAST 25 YEARS, THE PARTY HAS BEEN DOMINATED BY A RELATIVELY SMALL GROUP OF MEN, WHOSE NUMBERS HAVE RECENTLY BEEN SHARPLY REDUCED BY AGE AND ADVERSE POLITICAL FORTUNE. THIS REDUCTION IN NUMBER HAS NOT, HOWEVER, RESULTED IN THE INTRODUCTION OF A NEW GENERATION BUT, RATHER, IN THE CONCENTRATION OF LEADERSHIP RESPONSIBILITY IN AN EVER-SMALLER GROUP. WITHIN THIS GROUP, ALDO MORO WAS, UNTIL HIS KIDNAPPING AND ASSASSINATION IN MARCH-MAY 1978, PRIMUS INTER PARES. UNLIKE HIS COLLEAGUES IN THE OLIGARCHY, MORO WAS THE ONLY ONE CAPABLE OF OBTAINING PARTY-WIDE SUPPORT AND HE ESTABLISHED THE PARTY'S PRESENT POLITICAL POLICY AND BASIC STRATEGY. WITH MORO'S DISAPPEARANCE, A CONTEST FOR THE LEADERSHIP OF THE PARTY HAS BEGUN ALONG WITH A GROWING DEBATE ON THE PARTY'S POLICIES AND STRATEGY. BUT CHANGE COMES SLOWLY IN THE DC, AND PREFERABLY WITHOUT ANY VISIBLY BROKEN CROCKERY.

4. IN THE LEADERSHIP CONTEST, IT IS UNLIKELY THAT
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ANY ONE PERSON CAN ACHIEVE THE DOMINATING POSITION THAT MORO OCCUPIED. INSTEAD, A NEW FORM OF COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP IS MORE LIKELY TO EMERGE IN TIME. INTRA-PARTY DEBATE IS NOW LARGELY CONCENTRATED ON THE PARTY'S POLICIES TOWARD AND STRATEGY FOR DEALING WITH THE COMMUNISTS AND SOCIALISTS. THERE ARE TWO BASIC TRENDS (AND ENDLESS REFINEMENTS AND NUANCES). ONE GROUP CLAIMS THAT THE ONLY FORESEEABLE LONG-TERM SOLUTION TO ITALY'S POLITICAL PROBLEM IS THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY (A THEME SUPPORTED BY PRIME MINISTER ANDREOTTI AND PARTY SECRETARY ZACCAGNINI, BUT WITH CLEAR RESERVATIONS ABOUT THE EXTENT OF DEMOCRATIZATION ALREADY ACHIEVED). THE OTHER TENDENCY IS TO BE SKEPTICAL ABOUT POSSIBLE FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES IN THE COMMUNIST PARTY AND TO

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FM AMEMBASSY ROME

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5126

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 ROME 15394

LIMDIS

FOR EUR/WE

ENCOURAGE THE EVOLUTION OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY TOWARD
TRADITIONAL WEST EUROPEAN SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC POSITIONS
(A TENDENCY SUPPORTED BY FOREIGN MINISTER FORLANI,
DEFENSE MINISTER RUFFINI, EX-PRIME MINISTER RUMOR,
ETC.). BOTH GROUPS ARE, HOWEVER, CONTENT TO LEAVE THE
PRESENT GOVERNING ARRANGEMENTS AS THEY ARE (WITH A DC
MINORITY GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNISTS IN THE PARLIAMENTARY
MAJORITY) AT LEAST UNTIL NEXT SPRING WHEN SOME FORESEE
THE LIKELIHOOD OF EARLY PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS.

5. FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE, THE DC WILL REMAIN THE
LARGEST NON-COMMUNIST PARTY IN ITALY AND ITS CHOICES
WILL LARGELY DETERMINE ITALY'S POLITICAL AND
ECONOMIC ORIENTATION. THERE ARE MANY SIGNS OF RENEWAL
AT THE DC'S GRASS ROOTS AND IN ITS PARLIAMENTARY GROUP
BUT, WHILE THE NEW PEOPLE APPEAR BOTH MORE CONSERVATIVE AND
MORE COMMITTED TO REFORM AND REJUVENATION OF THE PARTY
AS WELL AS MORE RESPONSIVE TO THE NEEDS AND WISHES OF
THE TRADITIONAL DC CONSTITUENCY THAN THEIR ELDERS, THE
SIGNIFICANCE OF THAT RENEWAL IS NOT YET CLEAR. THE
QUESTIONS OF PARTY LEADERSHIP AND RELATIONS WITH THE
COMMUNISTS ARE THE PRINCIPAL ISSUES WITHIN THE PARTY;
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HOW THEY ARE RESOLVED WILL BE OF GREAT IMPORTANCE FOR
FUNDAMENTAL USG INTERESTS IN ITALY AND THE MEDITERRANEAN.
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